The Cry of the City

BY

REV. CHAS. R. BROWN

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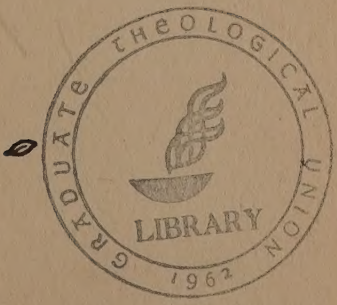

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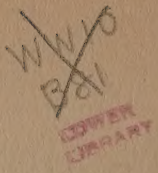

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THE CRY OF THE CITY.*

"And when He was come near, He saw the city and wept over it."—Luke 19:41.

WE find tears in the eyes of Christ twice and only twice. He was not easily moved to such a display of feeling. He had none of that nervous hysteria which wails and weeps at the slightest provocation. His habitual serenity therefore made these two occasions when He wept all the more significant.

You remember that on both these occasions his tears were not because of any personal discomfort or disappointment; they were tears of sympathy. He bore his own trials with a calmness that was marvelous. He looked into the face of a howling, ungrateful mob, whose sick friends He had healed, whose own sins He was eager to forgive, moved now by bigotry and hatred to yell for His destruction, and not a tear came! He watched one of His friends go out into the dark to betray Him for a handful of silver,

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11976

and He heard another, who had sworn undying friendship, deny Him once and again and again—this treachery He witnessed and not a tear fell! He hung upon the cross insulted, dishonored, torn with physical anguish and with moral disappointment, but He hung there until He died not weeping but praying! Brave, strong, serene He was throughout! The crushing experiences which bring tears to the eyes of ordinary men He bore without a murmur.

The two occasions when He did weep were, first, at the grave of Lazarus when He saw the anguish of the two grief-stricken women. We know the wealth of affection in Mary's nature, and when Jesus saw her standing with Martha at the tomb of their only brother, the brief comment is, "Jesus wept."

The other occasion is the one referred to in the text—"And when He came near and saw the city He wept over it." He had spent the night at Bethany: He came up over the Mt. of Olives where the view of Jerusalem bursts upon you suddenly. There before Him lay the city of David that holds such sacred place in the three leading religions of the world,—Judaism, Mohammedanism and Christianity! It had within it such mighty possibilities for good; it was hurling itself so blindly along the way of disaster and sorrow! "If thou hadst known," He cried, "the things that

belong to thy peace!" But the conditions of peaceful, joyous, useful existence seemed to be hid from their eyes. Thus it was that the pathos of the situation touched him deeply—"and when He came near and saw the city, He wept over it."

The cry of the city then is my theme. The cry is not always an audible one, but the city, as you stand off and look at it, thinking of the possibilities bound up within its life, makes a tremendous appeal. The very approach to any city stirs the heart of every man who has any moral imagination. You ride across the lagoon on the long mole that carries you out to the city of Venice lying like some brilliant water fowl on the face of the sea; your thoughts run back over the splendid history of this Queen of the Adriatic and you think of how she has fallen—the contrast is mournful! You sail into the beautiful bay of Naples, with Vesuvius smoking and smouldering on your right, and the distant view of this capital of southern Italy with its lovely situation and its narrow streets reeking with dirt and wretchedness fills you with sadness! You cross the land of Goshen and the Nile Delta until the minarets of Cairo and the mighty Pyramids, keeping watch outside the gate, stand out against the sky; you think of the ancient city of the Pharaohs, this oldest home of civilization, and the tawdry life of

these modern times is pathetic in its feeble contrast! You come up across the sea of Marmora to the loveliest of them all, the city of Constantinople, with its mosques and marble palaces, and the thought of all the squalor and wickedness massed there in that city of the Turk makes an overwhelming appeal to your sense of pity!

But coming nearer home, you ascend to the top of the Call Building yonder and look out over this great city that lies around our San Francisco Bay! You think of all that goes on under these many roofs, the right and the wrong, the improvement and the degradation of humanity, the bringing out of the divine image in many a life like the developing of a picture on a film, or the slow blotting and blurring process which effaces the look of the divine! What a sight a city is! What a beautiful and inspiring creation its highly organized life may become; what a foul and terrible disgrace whole sections of the city life do actually become! Thus Jesus stood on the heights above Jerusalem and thought not only of that city but of all the cities that would adorn and would disfigure the earth down through the centuries, and when he saw the sight he wept over it.

There are many facts that contribute to the pathos of city life—first of all the crowded conditions. Occulists tell us that the easiest

color for the eye is green. The red lamp shade irritates your eye; the green shade is restful. Thus God has made the trees and the grass green. But alas for the people who live their lives where all the green is miles away! They may journey to it now and then but their daily outlook is upon brick walls and stone streets. Not only the sensitive eye ball but the still more sensitive moral nature suffers from the outlook!

And then the souls of people cannot be packed tight in thick layers without suffering loss of shape and character. The house is small or more commonly it is a narrow tenement or perchance a single room. In one great city half a million people belong to families which live in one room; and half a million more to families living in two rooms. Men, women and children are huddled together! How hard it is for modesty to stand that strain! How hard for womanly virtue to grow straight and true under such conditions! The self-respect, the privacy, the reserve demanded for every life which is to unfold in healthful fashion are there impossible. And when He saw the crowded life of the city He wept over it!

And the cities are not to grow smaller but larger! When you ride across the continent and see what a roomy place the world is, what areas of blue sky, how much pure outdoor air,

what wide unoccupied spaces, you wonder why people should be huddled together as in Chicago, never breathing a mouthful of clean air, never standing on a space one hundred feet square without a score of other lives touching elbows, never seeing the sky except as it looks down through a thick veil of smoke and soot—you wonder why it must be so!

But the forces that bring people together in cities are industrial forces and they are permanent. The labor saving farm machinery makes it possible for one man to raise as much wheat today as five men used to raise with the old fashioned plow and sickle. The other four are not in demand in the country and they must seek their fortunes in the city of manufacture and trade. There is labor saving machinery in the city as well, but the effect is not the same. The country is chiefly engaged in the production of food. The ability of the world to eat food is necessarily limited, for people can only eat a given amount, no matter how rich they are. But their ability to use the manufactured articles which the city produces is only limited by their financial ability. The family may keep house with four chairs or with forty or with four hundred, according to taste and purse. Therefore the food producing country is limited it its market while the manufacturing city may increase its output indefinitely. This

fact will bring the people together in great and ever greater cities and the crowded conditions are here to stay.

The concealment of the city which covers so much wrong adds also to its pathos. The light of day is a good policeman. The force of public opinion is a great deterrent from wrong doing. In the country or the small village wrong doing is more easily and constantly apparent. The fear of personal disgrace or of dishonor to one's family acts as a safeguard. But in the city it is easy for any man to run away and hide for a night or a day. The fact that the individual is lost in the crowd lends aid to the forces that degrade. Thus there comes to be the hidden, underside of the city life. You know in a dim way that it is always there and when your moral imagination pictures it, the vision is a sad one.

Suppose that yonder on the hills back of San Francisco two pagan temples stood, one erected to Bacchus and one to Venus! And suppose that each year it were required that one hundred young men and one hundred young women should be taken out and slaughtered in those temples as sacrifices to the unclean god and goddess who presided over them. What a howl of moral indignation would go up from the people of the city! When an electric car last week crushed the

life out of a child the mob gathered in the street and threatened the motorman, although the occurrence was a sheer accident. Had he killed the child deliberately his life would have paid the penalty at the hands of the mob! And what an angry mob would hurry to the hills and tear in pieces those foul temples and thus forbid the cruel sacrifices! But all the while in the under life of the city the sacrifices to Bacchus and to Venus are going on; two hundred young lives dishonored as well as destroyed would be a small estimate for a year of moral wreckage in any great city! The under life of the city—when you draw near and look with careful eyes you are ready to weep over it.

And once more, the hurried life of the city obscures the higher ideals. We live in a ceaseless round and round. One thing crowds another out like the succession of wads in a gun, only to be crowded out itself by something else. Engagements follow upon one another thick and fast; and when nothing else is doing the telephone bell rings in peremptory fashion to make some fresh demand. Everybody is saying, "there are not hours enough in the day nor days enough in the week nor weeks enough in the year to get it all in!" What a busy, restless, eager life it is!

In the slower life of the country or the village the people take time to watch the sun go down and to study all the rosy tints. They take time to watch the grass grow, the trees bud and blossom, the lambs play in the field. They take time to sit around the fire evening after evening watching the forms in the grate while they talk or read of the things that are true, pure, honest, lovely and of good report. Soul growth demands time, quiet and restful meditation. A rose bush would not thrive nor produce American Beauties if it were being jerked around sixteen hours a day, now on a street car, now in a gurney, now on a bicycle, now on foot hurrying to meet the next engagement! How fares that tender plant called reverence, devotion, Christ-like character under the strain and stress of hurried life! The lives that are worried and wearied by the high pressure of city life make their appeal. God intends us to grow tall, strong, straight and serene! The city makes such growth difficult and when the Master of those values draws near he sees its hurried life and weeps over it.

We might go on indefinitely but these points will suffice. The city life has many aspects that are pathetic to the man of conscience. We are concerned about all this here in our own city. Oakland is not a great city as yet but all the signs and tokens point in

that direction. The car loads of produce from the east will not always be carried across the bay only to be brought back again, many of them, for distribution along the coast. The great distributing center for the mighty tides of produce that sweep toward our shore on their way to the awakening Orient will some day be on our side the bay. The treasures of the Orient on their way to the markets of this great land will also be landed here upon our shore. The ship and the car, the east and the west, will meet at the point of least resistance and that will be here upon our Oakland side of the bay.

Thoughtful people east and west are saying that in fifty years there will be three and only three cities of the first rank in the United States. First, New York opening eastward from the richest country on earth toward Europe the smallest but today the busiest of all the continents! And second, Chicago draining the Mississippi Valley, the largest and most productive agricultural area that lies beneath the sky, and opening upon the Great Lakes! And third, the city around this bay opening westward upon Asia, the largest and most populous of all the continents, now awakening to a hunger that will stimulate all the markets of the world! Perhaps fifty years is too short a time for all this, but when you think of Chicago fifty years ago

—a mere nothing on a bleak western prairie; or New York fifty years ago—a city then of minor size, unregarded among the capitals of the world, now second only to London—such progress makes the dream of the great city that will stand upon this bay seem not extravagant! And when that day shall come the larger half of the mighty city yet to be will not stand upon the peninsula yonder but here at the foot of these hills, here on the shore where railroad and steamboat meet without let or hindrance. The foothills behind us will glisten in the evening sun with countless happy homes; the splendid bay before us will be forestlike with the clustering masts of many ships; these streets will be crowded with busy people carrying forward that marvelous development in the world's unfolding life! Then the Master will come and stand upon our Piedmont hills and unless our Christian forces are equal to the greater needs of that not distant day, He will again see a sight that will cause him to weep over a city that regards not the things belonging to its peace.

In the light of this larger development what are the needs of our city? They are many—more that could be named in this half hour. The city must have smooth, clean streets with breathing places in many squares and parks; abundance of pure water at honest rates;

safe and quick transportation that the blood of the city's life may flow easily and everywhere; dwellings that are sanitary and homelike; schools with buildings well built, well equipped, and in every room a teacher who is a center of light and inspiration; libraries filled with books sending out their silent messages to instruct and uplift; hospitals for the help of those who need a special ministry; newspapers that tell the truth and those portions of the truth that are for the city's health and not for its hurt; recreations that re-create and do not deaden nor destroy; occupations enough for all and under conditions that humanize and not brutalize—all this the city needs for its enlarging life! These things belong to its peace and they are not hidden from our eyes.

But back of them all as the driving force which is to secure them and keep them, the city needs higher purpose, spiritual ideals, moral energy. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, not because of the condition of its streets or water supply, not because of its lack in schools and hospitals; He wept over it because of something more fundamental—the lack of high purpose, of spiritual ideals, of moral energy which made it unable and unwilling to secure all the things that belonged to its peace.

Jesus wept because the people of that ancient city were refusing Him; they were de-

clining their rightful allegiance; they were casting off the ideals that alone would bring them peace and were hoarsely bawling out, "We have no king but Caesar." The free, aspiring, resolute spirit that produced the prophets, that created this literature in the Bible, that kept alive the Messianic hope until Christ came to fulfil it, was dying or dead; they were becoming the slaves of earthly force and of material things; they recognized no king but Caesar. It was over this spiritual decadence most of all that Jesus wept.

The city life is surely doomed to disaster unless there is maintained within it that system of spiritual forces that alone can quicken and elevate it. The higher life of the city receives help from many agencies, but mainly from that same Gospel which Jesus brought to the city at the foot of the Mt. of Olives and which He brings today to all the cities of the world. Among the many institutions of the city life, must stand the strong, intelligent, consecrated churches whose light cannot be hid, sending out their beneficent message and influence to guide the city in the way of health and peace. In this greater city of Oakland yet to be, there must stand not a few great churches at the center alone, but many vigorous churches useful and good with the life that was in Him!

The time to do the work that will produce such churches against that day of greater need is now. The Lord began long ago in order to have the great Sequoia trees ready for our coming—had He waited until He saw the pioneers coming over the Sierras in '49, the trees would not have been here. In the far distant past he began to sow the seeds of those splendid forests which adorn the hillsides in Mariposa and Calaveras. In similar fashion if we are to have mature, well developed Christian forces organized and at work when the city of several millions shall find its home around this bay, it is for us to be sowing the seeds of that larger undertaking in these days of quiet preparation.

The ideal life in the Old Testament is pictured as being in the past and located in a garden. The ideal life of the New Testament is placed in the future and its home is in the city. It is this later, higher, harder ideal that stirs the hearts of men in this twentieth century. The noblest achievement in the world's redemption will be "the city of God." It must be built after the pattern showed unto John in the mount when he saw the "New Jerusalem" descending out of the heaven of dreams and taking solid and actual shape in the busy life of city men. It must be roomy and cosmopolitan that the nations may bring their glory and their honor into it. It must

bravely exclude that which defiles and works abomination and all that makes for the lie. In all the channels of its glad activity there must flow the pure river of the water of life proceeding out of the throne of God. And in the middle of every street, in the very center of its onward movement, the trees of life must grow, bearing their many kinds of fruit for all the changing months and moods of human need, and reaching out those countless leaves of help which are to be for the healing of the nations. The highly organized life which finds place in the city, when devoted to true ideals and ennobled by the spirit of the Master, will stand as the last and best creation of the mind and power of Christ.

Those old Hebrews "prayed for the peace of Jerusalem." They worked for it, fought for it, gave for it. And when they dreamed of heaven it was to them another and a "New Jerusalem," so great was their love for the city of their choice. Something of that same feeling of attachment, of responsibility and of aspiration must fill the hearts of all our city Christians if we are not to fail in the high task before us. Pray for the peace and well being of Oakland! Be ready to work for it, fight for it, give for it! Add strength to those institutions and activities that are set for the higher life of our city.

We must have through the co-operation of all the Christian people many churches with good buildings, good music, good preaching, abounding in useful activity and helpful fellowship. We must have churches that are not engaged in a continual life and death struggle for their own existence but living such vigorous lives that they can confidently offer to the community the moral leadership it craves. We must have churches able to gather the people together Sabbath after Sabbath and feed them on faith and hope and love until their lives will be strong for useful service. We must have churches that shall so realize and so minister the divine help, that it shall be seen indeed that "the tabernacle of God is with men" and that His gracious purposes are being realized in the close knit relations of the city life. Then when our Master shall come and stand on the Piedmont hills and look over the mighty city around our bay, He will rejoice over it with an exceeding great joy.

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